



Madison Parks Division

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**MADISON
PARKS**

MEMORANDUM

Date: March 6, 2026

To: Board of Park Commissioners

From: Eric Knepp, Parks Superintendent

CC: Mayor Rhodes-Conway; All Alders

Re: **Odana Hills Golf Course & Park Improvements Leveraging Private Donor Funding**

The City of Madison Parks Division has another exciting opportunity to advance the recommendations from the Task Force on Municipal Golf through a generous donation from a Madison family. The Parks Division has begun working in partnership with Michael and Jocelyn Keiser and the Madison Parks Foundation to develop a plan for investing in the long-term future of Odana Hills. This collaboration is rooted in the work of the Task Force on Municipal Golf in Madison Parks and builds on the success of the previous partnership that helped transform The Glen Golf Park.

Recap of The Glen Project

In 2021, the Keiser family approached the Parks Division and Madison Parks Foundation with an entirely donor-funded proposal that led to the complete renovation of The Glen Golf Park. The Glen project was completed in 2022 and has exceeded expectations. Golf programming at the Glen has grown significantly, with an increase of more than 40% rounds of golf played and revenue generated. The Glen project created opportunities for the community to enjoy non-golf programming by shifting mindsets and creating space for family movie nights, live music series and fitness activities to take place at the golf park. Prior to the completion of The Glen project, public use outside of the golfing season was very limited, whereas 35 non-golf activities were held in 2025. From an ecological standpoint, The Glen's redesign increased native area plantings by over 1000%, which substantially improves the quality of habitat for flora and fauna, while reducing the amount of land intensively managed as turfgrass. All of these factors combined have strengthened the financial, social, and environmental sustainability of The Glen, while making it more welcoming to the community.

Proposed Odana Hills Project

The proposed Odana Hills project would follow a similar model but be more comprehensive than The Glen project. The course redesign and construction project, involving tees, greens and surrounds and some course routing, would be supported entirely through private donations. However, there would need to be a significantly larger investment in City and Golf Enterprise Program funding resources to achieve the best possible outcomes for the golf course and park.

The project presents great potential for the City to leverage the private donation and take advantage of the course disruption in a way that would allow for public infrastructure improvements that would otherwise be delayed for years. The Odana Hills project creates an opportunity to implement recommendations from the adopted Wingra Watershed Study that will address stormwater management and flood mitigation improvements. Likewise, the project has the potential to explore implementing recommendations from the Madison in Motion plan that could create improved bike path connections, while enhancing the overall park experience. Along with the course work, the potential for redesign and redevelopment of the eastern portion of Odana Hills, including the clubhouse, parking lot and park area. Each of these improvements together will result in a more resilient and sustainable activity hub that will better serve the needs of the community and park users.

Golf Enterprise Program Financial Situation

The proposed project also provides a significant opportunity to secure a stronger financial future for the Golf Enterprise Fund (GEF). The GEF has the goal of operating independently of tax levy support, including both operating and capital costs. The GEF struggled significantly to meet this goal over the 2000-2019 period, with both fund position and condition continuing to weaken. By 2019, liabilities exceeded assets and the GEF regularly had negative operating income. Since 2020, the GEF has improved significantly with both a strengthening of net position and annual operating income being positive each year. There are a number of factors that have contributed to this, but certainly a significant contributor has been the privately supported capital contribution to the GEF's assets through The Glen project. Replicating that model will allow the GEF to grow its assets by millions of dollars and have a more secure future revenue stream to support long-term operational success.

Implementing Task Force Recommendations

The [Task Force on Municipal Golf in Madison Parks final report](#) that was adopted by Common Council in 2021 created a future vision that continues to guide the work of the Golf Program. These recommendations set the table for this unique collaboration. Building from the momentum of The Glen project, this project will strive to directly address at least half of the 10 recommendations set forth by the Task Force.

- The City should provide Municipal Golf in Madison Parks.
 - This project would improve the 18 hole Odana Hills Course so that it will be available for generations to come with limited City investment required. Odana has long been the Golf Program's most successful course, and having it redesigned by a world-class golf course development team will only increase its impact.
- The City should work to promote positive ecological outcomes at the golf courses through reducing reliance on limited natural resources and providing ecological assets.
 - Utilizing a similar conservationist-inspired model to The Glen and expanding on quality natural areas already present at Odana, the proposed design will emphasize sound active ecological restoration strategies and techniques that will position the course for long-term sustainability by restoring native habitat.

- The project will correspond with the Golf Program's plans to install an irrigation well, ending the need to rely on the municipal water services for irrigation.
- The design will maximize ecological value of the landscape to areas that are no longer manicured turf, increasing biodiversity of flora and fauna, including pollinators. The design would also promote the long-term health of the landscape through removal and pruning of select trees, replanting of appropriate tree species, restoration of native understory/savannah plantings, and establishment of native prairie areas.
- The City should work with stakeholders and staff to develop a specific action plan to promote equity and inclusion at all courses.
 - As proven at The Glen, Michael has extensive knowledge in golf course designs and recognizing that many of today's courses are geared towards advanced male players. Michael's design will seek to remove gender biases, making the course more enjoyable for all ages, genders and abilities.
- The City should work with residents, stakeholders, and partners to promote wider utilization by the community of the golf courses to better integrate the courses into the wider park system for uses other than golf.
 - Inspired by the Scottish principles of municipal golf, where walking and biking coexist alongside the game of golf, the design will seek to connect a variety of members of the public with the natural beauty of the course for purposes other than golf.
 - The redesign of the clubhouse and park area will allow for a more welcoming and intentionally designed activity hub that greatly increases the potential for golf park programming.
- The City should ensure that if City resources are used to invest in capital projects at golf courses it is done in an equitable and fiscally responsible manner to reduce negative impact on park services across the system.
 - Aside from staff involvement, the course improvement project will be fully-funded through private donations led by the Keiser family and Madison Parks Foundation.
 - The Golf Program is prepared to fund the clubhouse replacement project through golf reserves and golf borrowing. However, the City has an opportunity to leverage resources from various funding sources to make much needed and long-anticipated infrastructure improvements in this area.
- The City should work with the University of Wisconsin, including the OJ Noer Ag Research Station, to develop Integrated Pest Management protocols that are at the forefront of managing public golf courses.
 - The Golf Program has a long-standing relationship with OJ Noer and will continue to engage with research staff as the course design moves forward and as the course improvements come on line following construction.

Proposed Project Timeline

While a final timeline has not yet been confirmed, this project will need to move forward on an accelerated schedule in order to align partners and funding. If approvals and planning continue as anticipated, course work will begin as early as fall of 2026. A donation of this magnitude will require a formal legal agreement, which is expected to be in place by early summer 2026. Staff will continue to work with the Madison Parks Foundation as well as the Keiser family to ensure this is completed in a timely manner. An updated conceptual master plan for Odana Hills Golf Course and Park will need to be approved by the Board of Park Commissioners. Common Council and other committees will need to consider and take action any necessary agreements to allow the project to occur. Staff will continue to coordinate with all other City agency stakeholders to advance plans for public infrastructure improvements that will require approval and funding authorized by Common Council as well.

Necessary Temporary Course Closures

A project of this magnitude will require course closure. It is anticipated that at least a portion of the Odana Golf Course will need to close before the end of the 2026 season. At this point full closure of Odana Hills Golf Course is expected through the 2027 season and early into the 2028 season. The overarching goal is to time all aspects of the course and park improvement projects to be complete at the time of course reopening in 2028. A temporary closure of Odana Hills will have significant impacts on the Golf Program, golfers, as well as park users through the duration of the project. This interruption is necessary to maximize long-term impact and allow for meaningful reinvestment. This interruption will also mean a financial impact through lost revenue for the Golf Enterprise. However, it seems wiser to have a revenue loss and massive capital infrastructure infusion from private support than to have sustaining revenue with a rapidly deteriorating asset generating the revenue. Staff are working on a report regarding the financial condition and position of the Golf Enterprise and will complete that work as the 2025 Audit is completed.

Opportunity for Public Engagement

Odana Hills is a well-loved by the community. This project will generate a lot of interest and excitement, and the Parks Division is committed to communicating clearly and regularly as plans are finalized. The Parks Division is committed to ensuring that Odana Hills remains a welcoming, accessible and high-quality public golf course that serves the entire community for generations to come. An informational presentation will be provided to the Board of Park Commissioners at the March 11, 2026 meeting. Staff are planning for public engagement and stakeholder involvement opportunities, as well as preparing a project website. More details will be shared as they become available.

This is an incredibly exciting time for the Parks Division. The envisioned project has the potential to yield excellence that will serve not only golfers and park users, but also address multiple other needs in public infrastructure that will improve the environment and quality of life for residents. The Parks Division is extremely grateful for the generosity and forethought of the Keiser family and are confident this will be the step that puts the Golf Enterprise program on firm footing for generations to come.